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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 013181

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SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND DCM CALLS ON JI'S POLITICAL WING

Classified By: Political Officer Catherine E. Sweet, Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. New Zealand's Deputy Head of Mission briefed us about his meeting with Irfan Awwas, the leader of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), Jemaah Islamiyah's political wing (his reporting cable has been sent by classified email to EAP/MTS and INR/EAP). Awwas spoke about MMI's goal of peaceful implementation of Islamic law (shari'a), which he said would be achieved without violence and with exceptions for non-Muslims. He praised shari'a implementation in Aceh and expressed support for the proliferation of local shari'a laws in Indonesia. Awwas railed against Australia and the U.S., and argued that democracy has "not brought any good to people." Finally, Awwas claimed that there is no tangible proof that Usama bin Laden was responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks, saying bin Laden was the victim of an international conspiracy. Strachan's cable noted Awwas's "strong sense of moral superiority and dogmatic adherence to an impositional agenda," and added that "hints of a totalitarian mindset were chilling." End Summary.

12. (C) David Strachan, New Zealand's Deputy Head of Mission in Jakarta, briefed poloff November 6 about his meeting with Irfan Awwas, the leader of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), Jemaah Islamiyah's (JI) political wing; he also provided us with a copy of his reporting cable. (Note. The full text has been sent by classified email to EAP/MTS and INR/EAP. End Note.) Strachan said that he had been interested in meeting with MMI for some time, but cancelled last year when Awwas refused to meet him in a neutral location. This year, when Awwas reiterated that he would only receive Strachan at MMI's headquarters in Yogyakarta, Strachan sought and received clearance from Wellington to travel thereon October 6. He was accompanied by an interpreter.

Atmospherics

13. (C) Before turning to the substance of the meeting, Strachan set the scene by describing the atmospherics. He commented that MMI's well-appointed headquarters, including two late-model cars in the driveway, suggested to him that MMI has supporters within Indonesia's upper classes. Upon entering the office, he noticed a tape recorder placed prominently on Awwas's desk, which was switched on to record the conversation; he added that this was somewhat superfluous since an MMI official was madly transcribing the entire meeting onto a laptop as well. Only later, when he received a copy of MMI's trade publication detailing his meeting with Awwas, did Strachan realize that this courtesy call would become part of MMI's propaganda toolkit.

14. (C) Strachan told us that New Zealand's intelligence service had provided him with a list of questions, intended

primarily to draw Awwas out about the group's political philosophy. For example, they requested that Strachan ask Awwas's opinion about radical Islamist ideologues Sayyid Qutb, Abdullah Azzam and Sayyid Abul A'la (Maulana) Maududi. Awwas, however, did not bite; instead, he claimed that MMI's teachings are derived from the Qur'an, hadith and life of the prophet Muhammad. He asserted that MMI's primary purpose is to encourage implementation of Islamic law (shari'a) through proselytizing and jihad, which he quickly clarified did not refer to violent action. On the contrary, Awwas claimed, MMI "hated criminal activity in all its forms." (Note. Awwas's protestations notwithstanding, MMI spiritual leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir again voiced support for violence on November 6. Local media report that while preaching in East Java, Ba'asyir urged his followers to wage jihad in the southern Philippines or Iraq if they were so inclined, rather than in Indonesia. He said that the Bali bombers like Amrozi "were right but they waged jihad at the wrong time and wrong place" by attacking Indonesian targets. End Note.)

Shari'a: The Cure for What Ails You

15. (C) Awwas demurred when given the opportunity to praise Iran or Afghanistan under the Taliban as ideal Islamic societies. He was quite pleased, though, with shari'a implementation in Aceh, claiming that the criminalization of alcohol and prostitution had helped reduce the crime rate by 85 percent. Awwas also expressed support for local shari'a laws that are proliferating in Indonesia, calling them "a good development." When pressed about whether MMI would advocate for applying "hudud" laws and punishments (i.e., amputations for thieves, beheading for murderers, stoning for blasphemy and adultery), Awwas said they would. At the same

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time, Awwas was careful to say that non-Muslims would not be subject to shari'a regulations.

16. (C) According to Strachan, Awwas explained MMI would have five priorities if its ideal of a shari'a-governed society were realized: securing freedom of religion; protecting Muslim minds from being damaged by things like alcohol and drugs; ensuring that the only killings are those carried out for "a justifiable reason;" protecting property (including prescribing severe penalties for corruption and theft); and protecting the blood line by ensuring that children are legitimate. Strachan commented to poloff that this last remark was vaguely reminiscent of Nazis' master race theory.

17. (C) In Awwas's view, shari'a implementation under a worldwide Islamic caliphate would result in peace and harmony for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. He harkened back to the glory days of the caliphate in Al-Andalus as a model, noting the Muslim world's (ostensibly benevolent) influence in Europe.

Australia/America: Root of All Evil

18. (C) Strachan described Awwas as calm and even-tempered until Australia and the U.S. were mentioned. Awwas accused Australia of thwarting MMI's humanitarian relief efforts after the Yogyakarta earthquake, and he alleged that both Australia and the U.S. had mistreated Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. He heaped scorn upon the "legalization of decadence" that he said characterized American society, and called President Bush "the world's number one terrorist." Unlike other Islamist leaders, Awwas did not attempt to argue Islam's compatibility with democracy. Indeed, he disparaged Islamist political parties like the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) as power hungry, contending that Islam could never emerge victorious from within democratic systems. In his view, democracy has "not brought any good to people. The emergence of democracy (has) separated Muslims from Islamic teaching. If democracy gave a real chance to Islam, shari'a would be

more easily implemented." As for the state doctrine of Pancasila, Awwas asked rhetorically what 61 years of Pancasila had done for Indonesia, saying Indonesia was no different now than it was under colonialism.

¶9. (C) Finally, Awwas repeated the tired refrain that there is no tangible proof that Usama bin Laden was responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks. If there were, Awwas contended, he would be shunned by MMI. At present, however, bin Laden was simply the target of an international conspiracy.

¶10. (C) Strahan told poloff that he hesitated to challenge Awwas's numerous contradictory statements or probe too deeply on sensitive subjects because he was not sure how Awwas would respond. Although Awwas was largely placid through the encounter, Strahan said he felt uneasy in not knowing what might cause Awwas to erupt. In his cable, Strachan commented about Awwas's "strong sense of moral superiority and dogmatic adherence to an impositional agenda. Hints of a totalitarian mindset were chilling," he added.
PASCOE